

Transkei Scouting

by Andrew Murray McGregor, Divisional Commissioner for the Transkei during the 1960's.

My pre-Transkei Scouting

Whilst at Sea Point Boy's High School I had from 1919 become a Boy Scout with the 6th Green and Sea Point Troop and loved to be one with all the outdoor interests, hikes, camps, etc. After passing standard 8, I spent 2 years as a cadet in the General Botha and this of course stopped my scouting. I then returned to complete my Matric but my crowded final year at school prevented me from doing anything about scouting.

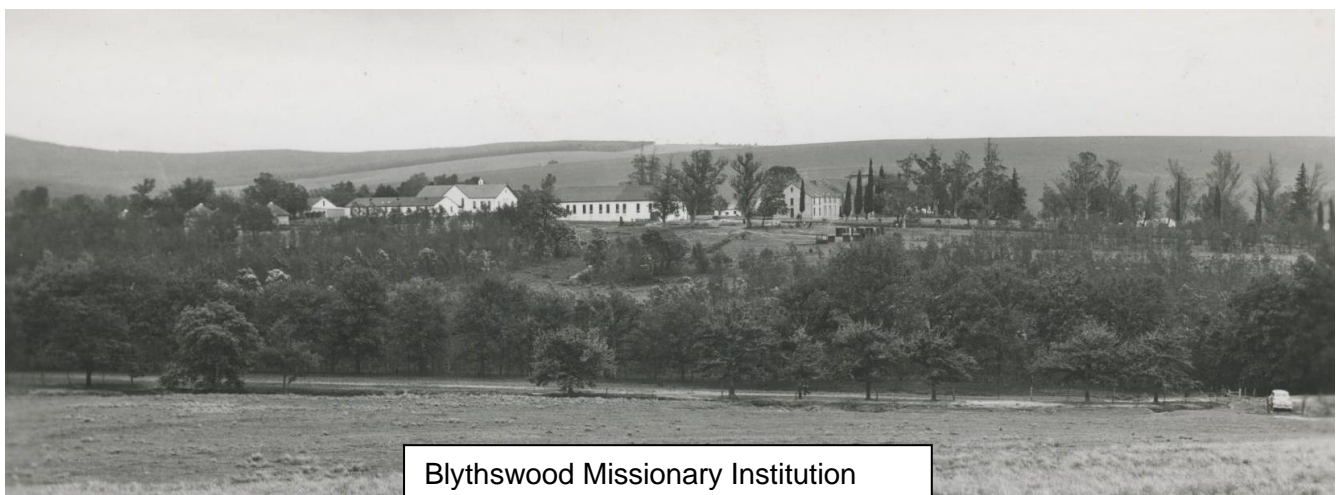
During my university years (1927 to 1931) I got involved in Sea Scouts (1927 – 1934) when Dr AP Moore-Anderson asked me to help him with the first Sea Scout troop in Cape Town. He had just formed Cape Town's first Sea Scout troop. He wanted to make it a complete troop, with Rover Scouts, Boy Scouts and Wolf Cubs in it but, to do this, he needed help. He already had a lady to run the Cubs and somebody for the Rovers, but needed someone to attend to the Sea Scouts. I was very pleased at his suggestion and so became Scout Master of the First Table Bay Sea Scout Troop. "APMA", as we called him, could then become our Group Scout Master.

I spent six years teaching at Hotentots Holland High School and here I joined the Strand Rovers (1934 – 1937).

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1938 Healdtown: In January 1938 I started my career as an educational missionary at Healdtown thought to be the biggest educational institution in Africa. There were Pathfinder Scouts that had been started by a Mr Hamish Noble - Three Troops, and I was put in charge of the Blue troop. Within a year he had decided to relinquish his Pathfinder activities and asked me to take over as Group Leader, which I was very happy to do.

1940 - Blythwood Missionary: In 1940 I applied for and got the post of Principal Teacher in the High School of the Blythwood (Church of Scotland) Institution in Fingoland. I had long been interested in the Fingos (AmamFengu) and my B. Ed. thesis had taken the form of a history of the Fingos.



Throughout all my time at Blythwood Missionary Institution in the Transkei (near Butterworth) (1940 – 1960) I used to run the Boy Scout troop there. We used to have three or four patrols and used to meet

every Friday afternoon. Several members of the staff aided me in this, chiefly Arthur August who had been a student under me at Healdtown (near Fort Beaufort) and a most active Boy Scout as well.

1950 - Divisional Commissioner Sliep: About 1950 a former Hollander named Sliep came to Umtata, where he and his brother started a business. He had been a Scout in Rotterdam and, when the Germans in 1940 had bombarded the place and destroyed practically every building in it he and some others risked their lives in continuing to run a troop of Boy Scouts although this had been prohibited by the Germans and was punishable by death.

He told me how he and other scouts would meet in spaces under the ruins of bombed-out buildings and practise and learn from the instructions sent by HQ in London, so that they could become skilled enough to pass the tests for their Scout badges and showed up their courage and dedication to the ideals of the Scout Movement.

Thus, it came as no surprise that Scout HQ in Johannesburg soon asked Mr Sliep to take over as Divisional Commissioner for African Scouts in the Transkei. He organised us into three 'Districts', Southern, Central and Northern Transkei, and asked three of us seniors in Scouting to act as District Commissioners, me to take the Southern District.

I found this a very interesting and rewarding post, especially as I travelled throughout my District, inspecting and encouraging existing troops and starting many troops when asked to do so by local committees. I took our dear old Morris car along many 'roads' and tracks that all but shook her to death! But it was well worth it, just to see how many Black men and women were keen of the Scout movement and thus started troops, even when there was no money nor any Scout equipment to use.

1966 - Divisional Commissioner Andrew Murray McGregor: In 1966 the Slieps moved elsewhere and I was asked to become Divisional Commissioner for the whole of the Transkei. This I was willing and proud to do.

I was able to find some good men for District Commissioners, which was a great encouragement to me. My biggest difficulty was, however, to find a place for a Scout HQ in Umtata and for a Divisional Secretary to run the HQ and to answer letters from the central Scout HQ.

Meanwhile, in order to increase interest among the troops, I started the idea of an annual Scout Jamboree in Umtata. We invited all the District Commissioners and all the Scouters of the Division to bring their troops, or a patrol from each troop, to this Jamboree for a week end, in order to demonstrate Scout efficiency and to take part in various competitions.

Somebody presented the Scout Movement in Umtata with a silver cup to be given to the most efficient troop. This was to be a floating trophy so I arranged for a number of small silver cups, about the size of an egg cup, to be given to the winners to keep, and arranged for the name of the troop to be engraved on it, with the date.

I loved the Scouts and the scouting, as it was something very useful and sane in a time when I was just about being driven mad by the new rules and regulations, not to mention 'visitations' of the many minions of the new Department of Bantu Education.

They used to roll up in a fleet of 'official' cars at any time, which always meant that I had to leave my teaching and other work to take these persons around the institution and answer their usually asinine questions without losing my temper.

They might have been very good 'officials' but they knew nothing about our work. Moreover, I was always expected to entertain them to tea or coffee!